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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

3 SEPTEMBER 1985

MEXICO: AN ELECTION POSTMORTEM

Summary

The sweeping success of Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in midterm congressional and gubernatorial elections in July will encourage party leaders to employ similar tactics in future races, in our judgment. Through a combination of hard campaigning and fraud, the PRI handily won the seven governorships contested, including those in the northern border states of Sonora and Nuevo Leon, where the US Embassy and most press observers had expected close races. The PRI also captured 292 of the 300 seats open to all parties in the lower house of the Congress and the vast majority of other state and local offices. [redacted]

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[redacted] US Embassy and press reports that the ruling party resorted to considerable fraud in the north, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, to achieve these results. Notwithstanding the extensive media and official coverage of these electoral abuses, we believe, [redacted]

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[redacted] the irregularities did not substantially affect the outcome of the gubernatorial races. We do believe, however, that electoral abuses enabled the ruling party to claim victory in many lesser contests, including a number of congressional and mayoral races. [redacted]

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This Memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. Information available as of 30 August 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Mexico Branch, Middle America-Caribbean Division, [redacted]

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In our view, the willingness of President de la Madrid and other leaders to employ such blatant tactics sprang from a concern over initial, and exaggerated, estimates of opposition strength and a desire to prevent the loss of even limited political power. Nonetheless, the outcome of the elections almost certainly will leave segments of the opposition frustrated, increasing prospects that they will call upon their leaders either more aggressively to defend their interests or withdraw from the political process. While less likely over the near term, segments of these disenfranchised groups could resort to violence to express their grievances. [REDACTED]

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Pre-Election Expectations

Before the elections, many political observers suggested there was a realistic prospect the PAN might capture a governorship. Some forecasts suggested that the ruling party might permit the loss of a governorship to buttress de la Madrid's "moral renovation" campaign. The PAN was also expected to increase its representation in the Congress substantially. Such a view seemed initially plausible for a number of reasons.

- Many Mexicans were assumed to be dissatisfied with government policies that had allowed the real purchasing power of most Mexicans to decline by a third since de la Madrid took office in December 1982. The elections, coming as they did near the midpoint in de la Madrid's term, were seen as a referendum on his leadership.
- De la Madrid on many occasions had pledged to conduct fair elections, and the contests were viewed as a test of his administration's commitment to "political reform".
- Election-related violence in the northern state of Coahuila last December and January, where, according to press and Embassy reports, the government apparently stole some elections, seemed to imply that there were high political costs involved in employing massive fraud.
- PAN officials, including party President Pablo Emilio Madero, appeared to take de la Madrid at his word when he declared the elections would be honest. Madero boasted before the elections that his party would capture three governorships and some 60 congressional seats.
- The government knew that dozens of US and West European journalists would be in Mexico to observe the voting and that they would report any electoral abuses they witnessed. [REDACTED]

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Election Results

Few outside observers anticipated a PRI victory on the scale that occurred on 7 July. In the days following the elections, the government recognized the PRI as the winner in all seven states that had gubernatorial elections--Campeche, Colima, Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, and Sonora. Mexican authorities also awarded 292 of the 300 congressional seats to the PRI, six to the PAN, and two to the Authentic Party of the Revolution (PARM), a small rightist group allied with the ruling party.(1) The percentage of the vote each party officially received in the 1985 congressional races, as well as in the two previous elections, is shown in Table I. Table II indicates the number of seats awarded each party in the 1985 contests. [REDACTED]

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The extent of the PRI's sweep in July's elections was evidenced by the fact it claimed victory in all of the races in the key state of Sonora, including, in addition to the state house, all seven congressional races, 69 mayoralities, and the 18 state deputy races contested. The US Consulate in Hermosillo noted that the official results appeared to be an attempt on the PRI's part to "crush" rather than to "accommodate" the opposition. [REDACTED]

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(1) Five of the PRI's victories in congressional races are still in dispute and could ultimately be awarded to the PRI, to other parties, or new elections could be announced. We believe at least some of the contested seats will eventually be granted to the PAN. [REDACTED]

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Table I. Percentage of Vote in Uninominal(2) Contests

	1985	1982	1979
PRI	65.99	69.27	69.74
PAN	15.45	17.53	10.79
PSUM/PCM	3.24	4.37	4.86
PDM	2.73	2.28	2.07
PST	2.45	1.79	2.12
PPS	1.97	1.90	2.58
PARM	1.65	1.36	1.81
PMT	1.50	----	----
PRT	1.25	1.27	----
PSD	----	0.19	----
Other	3.77	.04	6.03

Table II. Distribution of Deputy Seats (1985)

	Uninominal (300 Seats)	Plurinominal(2) (100 Seats Reserved for Opposition)	Net Change
PRI	292	0	-7
PAN	6	32	-13
PSUM	0	12	-5
PDM	0	12	0
PST	0	12	+1
PPS	0	11	+1
PARM	2	9	+11
PMT	0	6	+6
PRT	0	6	+6

(2) The Mexican Congress is composed of a 64-member Senate, whose members are elected concurrently with the President and serve for six-year terms, and a 400-member Chamber of Deputies. Three hundred of the deputies occupy so-called "uninominal" seats. They are elected from single-member constituencies and can represent any officially-recognized party. Another 100 "plurinominal" seats are reserved for opposition parties and distributed on a proportional basis, at least theoretically, taking into account the number of votes each opposition party receives in five electoral regions into which the country is divided.

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As shown in Table I above, the PRI officially received 66 percent of the vote in the 1985 congressional races, down about 3 percent from its total in 1982. The PAN won about 15 percent of the vote, 2 percent less than in 1982. Leftist parties captured about 10 percent of ballots cast, a share similar to that which they secured three years before. Nonetheless, support for the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), the country's major Communist-dominated coalition, declined from approximately 4 to 3 percent of the vote. The PARM only modestly increased its vote total in the 1985 elections. Yet it gained 11 seats in the Congress, reflecting apparent government favoritism of this alternative to the PAN. Absenteeism was about 50 percent nationwide, a figure higher than in 1982, when a presidential contest occurred, but about the same as in 1979.

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Election Aftermath

The elections and the period surrounding them were among the least violent in recent years, despite the fact they were marred by numerous irregularities, according to the US Embassy. In what was perhaps the most serious election-related incident, police in the northern industrial center of Monterrey broke up a PAN rally in early August involving some 40,000 to 60,000 demonstrators, according to the US Consulate. No deaths were reported, but several dozen people were injured after some protesters pelted police with stones.

More generally, the relative absence of violence would appear to reflect a combination of the following factors:

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--The heavy presence of police and security officials at the time of the elections also may have dampened enthusiasm among opposition supporters for a confrontation. The Army was on nationwide alert during and immediately after the elections.

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--PAN and other opposition leaders apparently discouraged their followers from engaging in violence. The defeated PAN gubernatorial candidate in Nuevo Leon, for example, postponed a protest rally that would have coincided with the installation of the state's new PRI governor. More generally, PAN supporters tend to be disproportionately urban, middle class professionals who, with more to lose, are less inclined than other Mexicans to join in civil disorders. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, in recent weeks PAN members have engaged in a number of protest activities to draw attention to their dissatisfaction with electoral abuses. In various areas of the north, for example, they have blockaded highways, staged shortlived hunger strikes, occupied town halls, and circulated petitions calling for the annulment of some elections. In addition, the leaders of Monterrey's five largest business organizations boycotted the installation of the new governor of Nuevo Leon and took out newspaper advertisements declaring: "We cannot be indifferent to the citizens' discontent with the irregular and corrupt way the July 7 elections were run in spite of promises of the cleanest elections in history." Many northern industrialists almost certainly will remain miffed as a result of the government party's recent rejection of de la Madrid's halfhearted attempt to grant business an official voice in economic decision-making. Large scale demonstrations could still occur in Sonora, where PAN leaders are alleging the ruling party stole the governorship and many other offices. PAN protest activities probably will culminate in mid-September, when the state's new governor assumes office.

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Election Tactics

The PRI won a massive victory in the elections in part through effective machine-style politics. In doing so, it had at its disposal millions of dollars provided by the national government, which enabled it to blanket key districts and states with campaign posters, according to the US Embassy. The ruling party also indirectly benefited from a number of pork barrel projects the government sponsored in the months before the elections. In Nuevo Leon, for example, Mexico City financed projects designed to alleviate shortages of water. The ruling party also sought to improve its electoral prospects by selecting more appealing candidates, according to the Embassy.

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[redacted] Embassy, and press reports that the PRI resorted to less respectable campaign tactics. These included the following:

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--Altering voter registration rolls to disenfranchise citizens considered loyal to the opposition while providing multiple registration certificates to loyalists. PAN President Madero,

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probably with some exaggeration, publicly charged before the elections that nationwide, the government had added the names of four million non-existent voters to the registration lists.

--Disqualifying opposition candidates in some jurisdictions. In Sonora, for example, 19 of PAN's candidates in the state's 69 mayoral races were barred from running for office on various technicalities.

--Denying PAN and other opposition observers access to polling places by rejecting their credentials or because of last-minute changes in election procedures.

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--Dispatching to polling places ballot boxes stuffed with votes cast for the PRI or allowing the theft of ballot boxes containing large numbers of votes for opposition parties.

--Sponsoring a disinformation campaign to discredit the PAN, in part by portraying it as a puppet of the United States, the Roman Catholic Church, and business interests. [redacted]

The irregularities were the most serious in northern Mexico, according to Embassy reports, but abuses occurred in other areas of the country as well. [redacted] PRI probably would have won the vast majority of races, including the governorships in Sonora and Nuevo Leon, even without the considerable and highly visible fraud. Electoral abuses did, we believe, enable the PRI to claim victory in many lesser contests, particularly a number of congressional and mayoral races. [redacted]

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Implications

The manner in which the government and ruling party conducted the elections suggests they were far more concerned about maintaining their firm grip on power than in holding fair elections or even marginally enhancing the credibility of the President's "moral renovation" drive. We believe the willingness of President de la Madrid and other leaders to employ blatant tactics sprang from a concern over initial, and exaggerated, estimates of opposition strength. De la Madrid almost certainly did not want to be remembered in history as the first Mexican President in over a half century to surrender a governorship to an opposition party. He also may have reasoned that the PRI had to assert its political authority in unequivocal terms at a time when his administration was demanding unprecedented economic sacrifices of the Mexican people. The PRI tactics also served as a reminder to the PAN and other opposition parties that elections in Mexico are more an occasion for affirming the popular mandate of the ruling party than affording voters an opportunity to express their wishes at the polls. [redacted]

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More generally, if, as some observers state, the elections marked a crossroads in Mexican politics, the outcome indicated that the de la Madrid administration has rejected a course that would lead toward greater power sharing. The elections also demonstrated that the PRI is firmly in control of Mexican politics and is unlikely to allow itself to face any real threat to its rule in the foreseeable future from either rightist or leftist opposition parties. Moreover, the outcome of the elections almost certainly will tempt the party to use similar tactics in the future, despite the embarrassing international press play such abuses received. In 1986, over a dozen governorships will be at stake, including several in key northern states such as Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa, where the PAN has considerable support. [redacted]

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The implications of the elections are, we believe, even more troubling for the PAN. The party, given its largely middle class constituency, has never attracted much support outside of the north and a few other areas of the country. The outcome of the elections suggests that its possible evolution into a significant political force at the national level has been arrested. The extent of the defeats the PAN sustained in northern Mexico could aggravate already existing intraparty divisions. In the future, in our judgment, party leaders will either have to challenge the PRI more forcefully in the face of fraud, which could result in a repressive response from the government, or withdraw from the political process to avoid losing credibility with, and support from, their followers. While we judge it less likely over the near term, segments of the opposition, such as the younger more combative "neo-PANistas", could resort to violence to demonstrate their displeasure. [redacted]

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The elections showed that leftist opposition parties remain small, internally divided, and unable to work together. The government's decision to allow the names of three new parties on the ballot in the 1985 elections--two leftist and one rightist--probably was intended to further dilute the strength of any single alternative to the PRI. The poor performance of the Communist-dominated PSUM, in particular, suggests that the left outside of the ruling party generally is likely to remain a feeble force in Mexican politics in the near future. [redacted]

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Although relations with the United States did not emerge in the elections as a major campaign issue, the ruling party did try to exploit traditional nationalist sentiment by portraying the PAN as subservient to US interests. It did so in part, according to the US Embassy, by funding the activities of the miniscule Mexican Labor Party, which conducted a propaganda campaign aimed at smearing the PAN, although it did not appear on the ballot (and for that reason is not shown in the tables.) [redacted]

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The short-term consequences of the elections are probably positive for the United States, since a Mexico under the firm control of the PRI appears likely to provide a relatively stable and predictable environment for US trade, investment, and tourism. Nonetheless, the PRI's handling of the elections, if it serves as a precedent in the future, could raise dangers for the United States over the medium and longer term. The potential for destabilizing violence in the future would appear to be greater because the PRI may have, in effect, closed a possible political "safety valve" by not allowing the opposition to share greater power. Should such a trend continue, opposition frustrations could manifest themselves in more significant civil disorders than those Mexico has recently experienced.

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Table 2

Selected Characteristics of States, 1980

	<u>Sonora</u>	<u>Chihuahua</u>	<u>Coahuila</u>	<u>Nuevo Leon</u>
Population in Millions	1.5	2.0	1.5	2.5
Percent change 1970-1980	37.8	24.3	39.6	48.2
Percent of Population Born Outside State	16.8	13.3	15.7	25.3
Percent Urban	70.5	70.3	75.8	87.4
Economically Active (1) in:	48.6	49.9	47.8	48.5
agriculture	10.1	20.7	15.8	8.4
manufacturing	4.7	12.4	14.4	24.6
Index of per capita income (Mexico=100)	124.3	102.1	112.0	150.5
With some Secondary	31.1	25.2	29.2	38.1

(1) Percent of the population 12 yrs old and older

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